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A.M. 05/27/2020

The NY Times promised to fact check their new climate denier columnist—they lied

Times' news staff trashes column on Twitter, while top scientist says paper is "willingly abetting climate change denialism."

JOE ROMM APR 29, 2017, 2:54 PM

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AD FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES' MARKETING CAMPAIGN. CREDIT: THE NEW YORK TIMES VIA ADAGE

The very first column the New York Times published by extreme climate science denier Bret Stephens is riddled with errors, misstatements, unfair comparisons, straw men, and logical fallacies.

Leading climatologist Dr. Michael Mann emailed ThinkProgress: "This column confirms my worst fear: That the NY Times management is now willingly abetting climate change denialism." Prof. Robert Brulle—whom the Times itself has called "an expert on environmental communications"—called the piece "climate misinformation."

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The column is so deeply flawed that New York Times reporters and news editors immediately started slamming it on Twitter. Even Andy Revkin, the former Times climate reporter and blogger whom Stephens quotes twice in his piece, slammed Stephens' piece on twitter as featuring "straw men" and other flaws.

The Stephens column proves three things:

1. Bret Stephens doesn't understand the first thing about climate science (and he provides no actual facts to support his claims).
2. The Times' editorial page staff overseeing Stephens apparently also doesn't understand climate science.
3. Editorial page editor James Bennet was not telling the truth when he told Huffington Post last week that the opinion side of the Times applies the "same standards for fairness and accuracy."

Indeed, the basic errors in Stephens' piece are so basic it is stunning that the New York Times published them—especially in the Trump era, where the paper advertises itself as a defender of truth.



New York Times defends hiring extreme climate denier: 'millions agree with him'

The Times replaces search for truth with search for popular ideas that are false. But would they hire a Holocaust...

In his entire piece, Stephens has only one sentence where he presents specific scientific claims—and he gets them all wrong:

Anyone who has read the 2014 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change knows that, while the modest (0.85 degrees Celsius, or about 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit) warming of the Northern Hemisphere since 1880 is indisputable, as is the human influence on that warming, much else that passes as accepted fact is really a matter of probabilities.

This probably sets the record for most errors in a single sentence ever published in the New York Times.

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Fact: "Anyone who has read the 2014 report of the IPCC knows no such things.

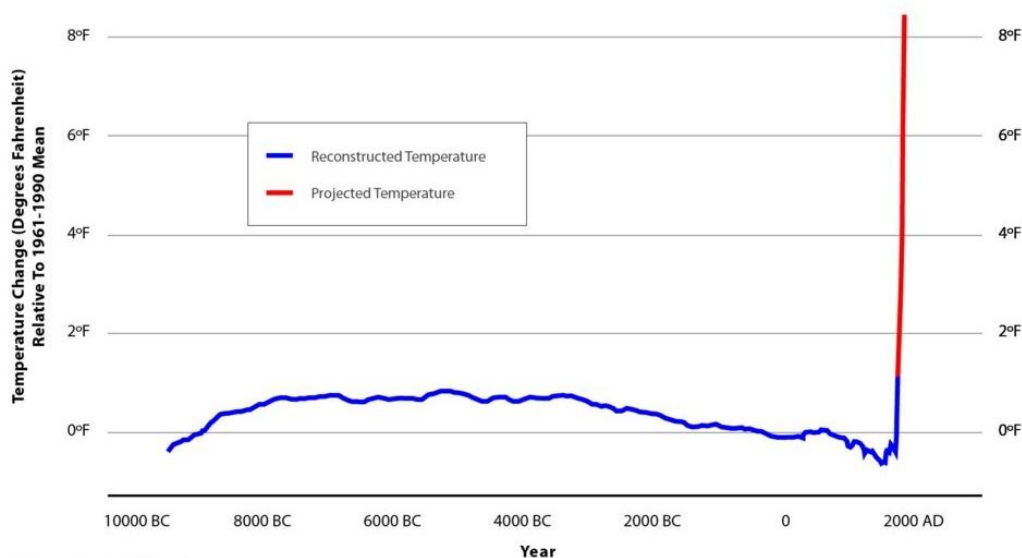
Fact: As you can see from the link which Stephens provided, the report clearly states that the 0.85°C warming is *global*:

The globally averaged combined land and ocean surface temperature data as calculated by a linear trend show a warming of 0.85 [0.65 to 1.06] °C [FN2] over the period 1880 to 2012...

As an aside, the northern hemisphere has been warming considerably faster than the southern because it contains much more land.

Fact: The 0.85°C is not "modest." It is roughly the same as the entire variation the Earth experienced during the several thousand years of stable climate that enabled the development of modern civilization, global agriculture, and a world that could sustain a vast population (as the chart below shows).

Carbon Pollution Set To End Era Of Stable Climate



Source: Science & ClimateProaress.org

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10000 BC 8000 BC 6000 BC 4000 BC 2000 BC 0 2000 AD

Year

Source: Science & ClimateProgress.org

Moreover, the *rate* of warming since 1880 is 50 times greater than the rate of cooling in the previous 5000 years—and it is the rate of change that humans and other species have to deal with. In addition, even this 0.85°C warming has been enough to substantially increase the probability of catastrophic events like Superstorm Sandy's storm surge—and their overall destructiveness.

Fact: It is clear from the sentence quoted from the IPCC that the 0.85°C is not "indisputable." That's why the IPCC gives a range of 0.65 to 1.06 °C. Indeed, the IPCC explicitly puts in a footnote on the same page saying "ranges in square brackets or following '±' are expected to have a 90 percent likelihood of including the value that is being estimated."

Fact: "The human influence on that warming" is equally disputable in the sense that the IPCC always presents its statements about the degree of human influence on that warming in probabilistic terms.

These last two facts are not a quibble. It goes to the very heart of Stephens' misunderstanding of science. He wants you to think that there is some sharp delineation in science between our certainty of what happened in the past and our uncertainty of what will happen in the future.

Indeed, the basic smear of Stephens' piece, which is titled "Climate of complete certainty," is that "claiming total certainty about the science traduces the spirit of science and creates openings for doubt whenever a climate claim proves wrong."

The thing is, while Stephens creates the impression that those advocating climate action routinely claim "total certainty about the science" he fails to provide a single instance of anyone doing that. Not one. It's the classic straw man fallacy.

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Promoting doubt and uncertainty was also the top strategy of the tobacco companies in their successful fight to delay serious regulations—and then it was embraced by the fossil fuel companies and GOP strategists like Frank Luntz in their successful effort to delay serious climate action.

In reality, pretty much every aspect of science has some aspect of uncertainty, error bars, or ranges of outcomes—including essentially every medical course of treatment you were ever recommended and every science policy recommendation ever offered by the scientific community to policymakers.

If we only acted in our private or public lives when there was 100 percent certainty, no one would ever act. You would never get into a car, fly in an airplane, or even stay home (where most accidents occur).

The point is, the presence of uncertainty or “error bars” has never been a reason for inaction. In one of his tweets responding to Stephens, Revkin notes that he wrote a 2012 piece citing this conclusion from a 2004 study, “uncertainty is the reason for acting in the near term, and that uncertainty cannot be used as a justification for doing nothing.”

The basic argument of Stephens' piece is an intellectually dishonest comparison between polling, which is not scientifically rigorous, with climatology, which is. It is truly stunning that the NY Times editorial page editors let Stephens make such an argument in his very first piece.

Stephens argues that because the Clinton campaign was overconfident about its voter polling, we can't trust basic climate physics. It's like your doctor diagnosing your persistent cough as early-stage emphysema caused by your two-pack-a-day cigarette habit, saying the overwhelming consensus of medical science is that you should quit smoking so it won't get worse—and your reply is, “but, doc, everybody thought Hillary Clinton was going to win.”

The cigarette analogy is apt for two reasons. First, as the American Association for the Advancement of Science explained in a 2014 report: “Physicians,

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The cigarette analogy is apt for two reasons. First, as the American Association for the Advancement of Science explained in a [2014 report](#): "Physicians, cardiovascular scientists, public health experts and others all agree smoking causes cancer. And this consensus among the health community has convinced most Americans that the health risks from smoking are real. A similar consensus now exists among climate scientists."

Second, the question is what is the most prudent strategy in the face of serious risks and certainty that isn't 100 percent. Obviously, the doctor doesn't know for sure whether cigarette smoking will continue to destroy your health. But that doesn't change the right course of action. Same for climate change.

Revkin tweeted about the myriad flawed arguments in the piece:

The column also features the kind of straw men and other familiar foils (e.g.: "demanding abrupt and expensive changes in public policy") used by those more wedded to a world view or policy position than committed to a deep examination of a complex and consequential problem.

Uncertainty is real, but hardly a reason for simply more conversation.



Andy Revkin
@Revkin

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Some quick thoughts on @BretStephensNYT take on climate science, policy, & implications of @deepuncertainty:
facebook.com/andrew.revkin...

3:04 AM - Apr 29, 2017 - New York, USA

23 272 412

How ironic that it is Stephens himself who appears "wedded to a worldview or policy position"—certain that the best course of action is inaction.

In every single one of his recent articles and interviews, Stephens never endorses a single serious climate action and in fact he [dismisses most of them](#).



NY Times' new columnist: Global warming can't be serious if activists have kids

The New York Times' indefensible hire of a climate denier keeps getting worse.

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Indeed, Stephens' line, "demanding abrupt and expensive changes in public policy raises fair questions about ideological intentions," actually flies in the face of the IPCC report he himself cites. The IPCC reviewed the entire literature and concluded the annual growth loss to preserve a livable climate is 0.06 percent—and that's "relative to annualized consumption growth in the baseline that is between 1.6 percent and 3 percent per year." So we're talking annual growth of, say, 2.24 percent rather than 2.30 percent to save billions and billions of people from needless suffering for decades if not centuries.

Had the paper subjected Stephens' piece to the "same standards for fairness and accuracy" as its news stories—as they promised—there would be very little left of it.

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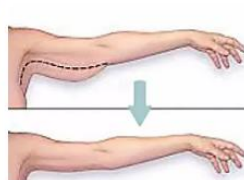
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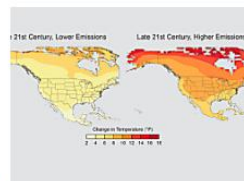
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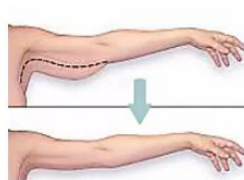
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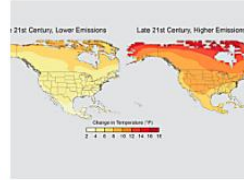
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